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Extension's Educational Objectives 1/

Extension work has grown out of the needs of rural people. If the extension program in a county is to continue to meet the needs of the families in the county, the objectives of the program must be adapted to changes in conditions facing rural families.

The industrial revolution, two wars, and the depression have brought great social and economic changes to the country. "Nor have the full effects yet been reached," says Dean W. F. Russell. 2/ "Important changes are still in the making. We are passing one of the great milestones of history. A society different from anything man has seen is developing. We are entering a new world."

Dean Russell was writing in 1931, long before the "new world" had revealed its most sinister political problems. True in 1931, how much more meaningful his words are for us today in the atomic age. Have our extension objectives recognized these great changes?

The most complete effort to state extension's objectives was made back in 1930 as a part of a comprehensive report to the land-grant colleges. 3/ This report states that "the objectives and programs of extension work do not adequately recognize that Smith-Lever extension includes not only vocational training but also important social and humanistic purposes. The fundamental purpose of extension education, namely, developing of rural people themselves, was stated as of first importance by only four institutions, as reported to the committee which made the study of the land-grant institutions."

The report goes on to state: ". . . in order to come nearer to the underlying purpose, much, much more must be done in fostering attitudes of mind and capacities which will enable rural people better to meet the individual and civic problems which confront them."

Progress has been made since 1930, when that report was issued. Yet some extension workers continue to stress production goals rather than educational objectives.

What do we mean by objectives?

An objective may be defined as the point or purpose toward which anything is directed. For example, the bull's eye of a target is the objective in archery. Changes in the behavior of people are the educational objectives toward which the extension worker is directing his efforts. As the educators say, the rural person who participates in the extension program "behaves" differently from the way he did before he took part. The participant knows some things he didn't know before; he understands some things he didn't understand before; he can do some things he couldn't do before; and he has some attitudes toward things that he didn't have

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1/ Prepared by M. L. Collings, Federal Extension Service, 1954.

2/ Russell, W. F.-The Frontier Within, Journal of Adult Ed., Vol. 3 pp. 283-289, June 1931.

3/ Survey of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities, U. S. Office of Education Bulletin, 1930, No. 9, Vol. 2 pp. 435-574.



before. These changes in behavior - these new knowledges, understandings, skills, and attitudes - were the objectives of the program in which he participated. Extension educational objectives then should be stated in terms of the particular changes in behavior with which the extension program is concerned. Obviously, objectives should vary infinitely with different counties, communities, and even families, depending upon the situation each presents.

### Sources of objectives.

How are extension objectives obtained? Since they are consciously willed goals, are they simply matters of personal preference of extension agents or leaders? Or is there a systematic attack which might be made upon the problem of what objectives to seek? It is true that, in the final analysis, objectives are matters of choice, and they must therefore be the considered judgments of those responsible for extension - both professional and lay leaders. Nevertheless, in making these judgments, certain kinds of information provide an intelligent basis for making decisions about objectives. As Dr. Ralph Tyler indicates <sup>4/</sup>, "No single source of information is adequate to provide a basis for wise and comprehensive decisions about . . . objectives." Dr. Tyler suggests these sources:

#### 1. Studies of extension participants themselves

As has been indicated earlier, education is the process of changing the behavior patterns of people. A study of the participants in extension programs themselves can help to identify needed changes in behavior patterns which extension should seek to produce. These needed changes may relate to various aspects of life, for example, to (1) health, (2) immediate social relationships, including life in the family and with friends and acquaintances, (3) sociocivic relationships, (4) consumer aspects of life, (5) occupational life, and (6) recreational. For each of these aspects of life, an investigation might be made of the learners' practices, knowledge and ideas, attitudes, interests and the like. Dr. Tyler cites as an example the study of health in which the investigation might go into such health practices as food practices, habits relating to rest and relaxation, habits of cleanliness, practices relating to safety and protection of health of others, present health knowledge and misconceptions about facts of health and hygiene, attitudes towards the importance of personal health and a feeling of responsibility for the protection of health of others, and interest in learning more about the field of health. In studying the needs of families participating in an extension program, the agent will find certain data to be common to most families whether they live in one part of the country or another, and whether they are farm or urban families. On the other hand, there are other facts which will vary quite markedly from one social class to another. Extension agents can draw upon general studies for certain information about family needs but will find it necessary to supplement this information by investigations of their own to gain information about the particular families with which they work. In other words, it is possible to identify some needs that are common to most families in a county, other needs that are common to almost all the families in a given community, and still other needs that are common to certain groups within the community but not common to a majority of the families.

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<sup>4/</sup> This entire concept of sources of objectives is adapted from Tyler, R. W. - Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Chicago Press, 1947.



To provide a thorough understanding of the possibilities of drawing out educational objectives from data about family needs (in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, etc.), an agent might list findings from studies made in his county or State. Then he might attempt to write down the educational objectives which these data imply.

## 2. Studies of economic, social and political problems

Since contemporary life is so complex and constantly changing, it is necessary to focus educational efforts upon the critical aspects and those that are most significant. Studies have been made of the factors conditioning life in particular counties or communities, such as the natural resources, population changes, migration, social participation, and other factors. Such studies give information about the conditions of life within the community, but do not directly indicate educational objectives. Data from these studies must be interpreted in order to suggest objectives for an extension program. An agent who wishes to use studies of contemporary problems as a basis for determining objectives might list some significant finding from studies made in his county or in a similar county. Then he might attempt to write down the educational objectives these data suggest.

## 3. Suggestions about objectives from subject specialists

Bulletins, project outlines, result demonstration outlines prepared by extension specialists, represent the specialists' solutions to problems facing rural families. These are the source of objectives most commonly used by extension people.

Many people have criticized the objectives specialists propose on the grounds that they are too technical, too specialized, or are inappropriate for a large number of the people who might participate in the extension program. If these criticisms are well-founded this is due to the fact that the specialist has not seen his function in terms of the "garden variety of citizen," as Dr. Tyler expresses it. He has suggested solutions for commercial farmers, for example, but not for part-time or subsistence farmers, for the high-incomed, rather than the average family.

Most of the materials prepared by subject-matter specialists do not list objectives specifically. Agents working with planning committees might profit by reviewing specialists' materials, drawing inferences from these materials and from them imply objectives.

## Screening Objectives

These three above-named sources will provide an agent with an extensive list of objectives. The next problem is one of screening the list to separate out those most significant and attainable. An educational program is not effective if so much is attempted that no one thing can be actually accomplished. Extension workers find it necessary to center their efforts on reaching significant objectives rather than to scatter their energies in attempting many less important aspects of the program.

To screen objectives an agent should ask himself two questions, namely: (1) Which of these objectives stand high in terms of the values which an extension agent and leaders consider essential to a satisfying and effective life? (2)

Which of these objectives are feasible and possible of attainment by educational methods and which are appropriate at this particular point in the sequence of an extension program? The agent will use his own philosophy to aid him in making the judgment of what is significant; and he will need some understanding of the psychology of learning to help him judge what is feasible and attainable. Once screened by the two questions, those objectives remaining on the list should be examined from this standpoint: What is the length of time over which each particular objective will need to be emphasized? Some objectives take years to attain; others are possible in the course of a single teaching contact.

### Levels of objectives

Objectives may be thought of as being in various levels 5/, each with its place and function. These levels may be illustrated as follows:

- (a) The remote, general aims. An aim is a generalized statement indicating the direction which a life activity should be taking. Thus conserving health is an aim. An aim may include any number of objectives. 6/
- (b) The general objective. A general objective is sometimes referred to as a long time objective. An example of a general objective is: understanding of important facts and principles of health conservation.
- (c) The specific teaching objective. For a single teaching contact there is use for one or more specific teaching objectives. For example, know how to care for fresh vegetables in the home to preserve their nutritive value and their eating qualities.
- (d) The rural family's objective. The person participating in an extension program has his or her own objectives. These are generally quite specific skills or some specific information. For example, a 4-H Club member may have as his objective to know how to feed his calf.

### Stating objectives so that they are a guide to teaching.

Agents sometimes state objectives as things which they themselves will do, for example, hold a meeting on legumes, or assist a family to can nonacid vegetables. These statements may indicate what the agent will do but they are not really statements of educational ends. Since the real purpose of extension education is not to have the agent perform certain activities, but to bring about changes in people, the objectives should make clear what change is expected.

The most useful form for stating objectives is to express them in terms which identify the person or group involved, the kind of behavior to be developed in

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5/ This concept was developed by Dr. M. M. Thompson, School of Ed., Univ. of Southern Calif., and is described by Dr. W. H. Burton of the Graduate School of Educ., Harvard Univ. in his book, "The Guidance of Learning Activities." D. Appleton-Century Co., 1944.

6/ Explained in detail by H. W. Hochbaum in his paper, "What Are the Aims in Rural Living?," presented at a Regional Extension Conference of the Northeastern States, 1936.



these people and the content of subject matter or area of life in which this behavior is to operate. 7/ For example: 4-H girls (persons) develop skill (behavior) in basic serving (content). Or, another example: Families in the county (persons involved) understand (behavior) the responsibilities of citizenship (content).

Each of the terms used in the objectives, both behavior and content, should have meaning so that they do not represent vague generalities which have no concrete significance to the agent. If they are too general, they cannot guide him in planning for teaching. By defining the desired educational results as clearly as possible the agent has a most useful guide in carrying on all the learning activities of an extension program.

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7/ Tyler, R. W. - op. cit.







